



Testimony of Gildemar Herrera  
AFSCME Local 3144  
H.B. 5356: An Act Concerning Pandemic Pay for Essential Workers  
Labor and Public Employees Committee  
March 6, 2022

Good morning, Senator Kushner, Representative Porter, and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. My name is Gildemar Herrera. I am IT Director for the New Haven Public School District. I am also a member of AFSCME Local 3144. I am here today to testify in favor of H.B. 5356, An Act Concerning Pandemic Pay for Essential Workers.

When we think of essential workers, the first thing that comes to mind are police, firefighters, and medical personnel. No one is thinking of those who work in IT. We are the unsung heroes of this pandemic. Not only were we essential, but many of the jobs I just mentioned could not function properly without someone in IT.

When schools shut down, our staff continued to come into work. Every single New Haven student who attended school remotely did so because of the dedication and sacrifices of the IT staff. We gave out more than 50,000 computer devices. It was our job to make sure these devices were working properly and that everybody had connectivity. Think about the time it takes to go through each laptop to ensure it was imaged, the software was up to date, and security features were installed. It was insanity. We interacted with parents and the public regularly because we had to hand out each device and fill IT requests. We did all of this with little to no resources.

My staff was afraid for their own health and safety, yet they worked through their fears to continue to serve New Haven students. More than half of my staff were exposed and became sick with COVID-19, myself included. Once they got better, they were back and ready to serve New Haven families again. Pandemic pay would help put back some of that money they lost and reward them for the extra efforts and time they put in. A lot of people were getting paid to stay home. We never got compensated in any way besides our regular pay to come do our regular job during a not so regular time. As their leader, I'm proud of them. They took it on the chin. Pandemic pay can also show honor to these workers. It would say, "Thank you for all of the extra sacrifices you made."

I urge you to support this legislation. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions you have.